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Widening crack brings Keystone Bridge rehab to a stop

Submitted by admin on Tue, 04/26/2022 - 13:15



Elkader's Keystone Bridge rehab project came to a sudden halt April 20, after a widening crack was discovered. The find shut down not only construction but pedestrian access across the bridge, out of caution. (Times-Register file photo)

By Willis Patenaude, Times-Register

Elkader's Keystone Bridge rehab project came to a sudden halt April 20, after a widening crack was discovered.

The crack, which is on the eastern arch closest to the Clayton County Economic Development office, saw sudden "movement," increasing in width from what project engineer Nate Miller from Origin Design described as a "hairline crack," or a sixteenth of an inch, to almost half an inch.

There's no concrete evidence as to why the widening occurred, especially since work at the time was occurring away from the arch and included no heavy machinery.

"I'm not going to speculate on the cause of the crack," Miller said during the April 25 city council meeting. However, it was acknowledged the crack was an unexpected and unforeseen occurrence. Unexpected because

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the "hairline crack," which was identified 15 years ago, has been monitored ever since with little movement until last Wednesday.

"We didn't anticipate this happening," Origin Design engineer Julie Neeble told the council.

As a result of the crack and the rarity of the limestone bridge, Origin Design has reached out to well-respected industry experts Atkinson-Noland & Associates (ANA) from Boulder, Colo., who have more experience with limestone bridges, to assist in information gathering this Thursday and Friday to assess the crack and the path forward.

So far, Origin has sent pictures and descriptions of the crack to ANA, but they will arrive to make an on-site determination with the help of surface penetrating radar to assess the crack, especially whether it poses any danger of destabilizing the structure.

Again, Miller did not speculate on possible repair scenarios or solutions because they have yet to determine the depth of the situation, only that, currently, it is a "structural concern."

"We are on the verge of having more information," Miller said.

The early phases of the bridge rehab also revealed greater mortar deterioration with the tuck-pointing than previously thought, adding cost to the overall project, though Miller asserted this falls within the contingency budgeted for the rehab.

Additionally, the halt not only stopped all construction on the bridge itself, out of what city administrator Jennifer Cowser termed "an abundance of caution," but it also shut down pedestrian crossing access for various safety reasons. This has caused innumerable inconveniences, but the city is without viable options to rectify the situation.

At the meeting, Miller mentioned exploring the possibility of installing a temporary bridge, but at a cost to the city ranging between \$500,000 and \$1 million, it was not deemed financially feasible.

The other option was to have the contractor, Moyna & Sons, provide a shuttle service. That was nixed, however, after the project manager from Moyna came back with a quote asking for \$1,450 per day to provide the service.

As of now, Miller asserted they are "acting as fast as we can" to resolve the situation, but at the moment are taking an "overly cautious" approach, which includes increased monitoring of the crack and only allowing construction to occur on either side of the bridge until an analysis can be completed on the crack. With the current knowledge at hand, Miller doesn't believe the bridge is in any danger of collapsing.

Regardless, the rehab has been put on pause and the timeline to completion, as well as any added cost for construction and engineering, is currently unknown until the information gathering session is complete. At that point, there will be "actionable information" to determine the best way to proceed.

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